

# Tri-State Community Church

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*Gathering a family who loves and serves God through  
Jesus Christ and leads others in kind.*

*A Bible Study in Mark  
Moralistic Religion Rebuked*

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Mark 7:1-13

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**Mark 7:1-13<sup>1</sup>**  
**Moralistic Religion Rebuked**

*Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed (Mark 7:1-2).*

In our text we learn of a group of Pharisees and Scribes who notice that Jesus' disciples do not wash their hands before dinner. Their concern does not center on matters of hygiene but on obedience to their longstanding tradition. <sup>3</sup> (*For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders, <sup>4</sup> and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash (vs. 3-4).*

Their tradition held that whenever a righteous person went to the mall or to any kind of marketplace where there were people who were not of the same religious stripe as them they must wash their hands before dinner for fear of contaminating their food with their pagan practices. Over the years this washing had become so important to them that they believed salvation could be obtained by it.

Angered that Jesus was not teaching His disciples to adhere to their traditions, the Pharisees and Scribes ask Jesus, *Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands (vs. 5)?*

**This is how the moralistically religious person reacts to those who do not adhere to their belief system—they get angry.**

Jesus was not playing by their rules so the moralists sought to destroy Him—this was the real reason for approaching Him.

Our text offers a classic example of moralistic religion. One writer captures the spirit of moralistic religion when he comments that the moralist could watch Jesus miraculously feed 5,000 men, in a remote area, with only five loaves of bread and two fish and complain that the 5,000 men did not wash their hands before eating!

Jesus rebukes moralistic religion sharply saying, *“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (vs. 6-7).*

There is nothing in God's Word which requires us to wash our hands before a meal for if there were Jesus would have certainly obeyed. The principle had evolved through interpretations of interpretations of interpretations of God's Word. God's Word did require Old Testament priests to wash at certain times. It was therefore concluded that we should all be like priests and hence came the law—wash before meals or defile your

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

self. Salvation for the classic moralist is a performance based salvation. To be saved or to have God's blessing you need to avoid certain things and do certain things.

When a true follower of Jesus calls his or her neighbor to put their faith in Christ, often their neighbor thinks that they are being called to moralistic religion—they think they are simply being told to be better people.<sup>2</sup>

When we call a person to Jesus we do not call them to this kind of religion  
for Jesus sharply rebukes it.

This type of religion is not based on God's Word but on laws made by men. Jesus says to the moralist: "*You leave the commandments of God and hold to the traditions of men*" (vs. 9).

Jesus then gave an example of how their man made doctrines actually rendered God's Word void: "<sup>10</sup> *For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'* <sup>11</sup> *But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God)-* <sup>12</sup> *then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,* <sup>13</sup> *thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do"* (vs. 10-13).

Jesus is making reference to one of the *traditions of the elders* which allowed a person to vow his property to God and still retain use of it. There was a catch, however; if their aging parents needed financial help, whatever assets were vowed to God would be unavailable. The son could not help his parents with these assets even if he wanted to. Therefore, by devoting his wealth to God through this tradition a person would no longer be able to obey God should his family have need.

It is ironic that many of the so-called irreligious pagans that the moralist was attempting to be clean of took proper care of their aging parents. There have always been examples of so-called non-religious people who were, by human standards, better people than their moralistic counterparts. In many cases, being moralistically religious is worse than being uninterested in religion at all.

When we call folks to put their faith in Christ, many folks think we are calling people to be moralistically religious. When we call people to put their faith in Christ we are calling people to live according to the Gospel. We are calling people to abandon their do it yourself righteousness and trust in Christ to make them anew. Until next time, may God richly bless you!

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<sup>2</sup> See Tim Keller, You Tube--The Gospel, Moralism, and Irreligion.

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